

SIDMOUTH

AREA 4 - BICKWELL VALLEY

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with contributions from Town and Parish Councils and Amenity Societies in East Devon

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SIDMOUTH

AREA 4 - BICKWELL VALLEY



Bickwell Valley; A c.1910 house. To the left is a modern house c.1980 infilled between the earlier development

1 HISTORIC AND TOPOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

1.1 Bickwell Valley is a natural hollow that merges into the landscape about a mile to the north west of the town centre. It is an early successor to the early to mid 19th century “sylvan suburbs” characterised by the dominance of landscape and vegetation over the built environment. Most dwellings are large and in extensive grounds enabling a gradual transition between town and country reflected in the fact that some parts of the Conservation Area are also included within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

1.2 The whole area was in agricultural use until about 1900. Bickwell Farm and Boughmore Farm reflect the area’s earlier history. Bickwell Cottage was originally a dairy for Bickwell Farm, and there are three thatched cottages on Cotmaton Road dating back to at least the early 19th century. Also within the conservation area is Cotmaton Meadow, an important remnant of open pasture, now virtually enclosed by development. It is owned by the National Trust.



Cotmaton Road; just east of the early 19th century development is this late 19th century group forming an L shape at the corner. As well as the striking polychromatic brickwork much original detail survives

2 CHARACTER AND SETTING OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

2.1 The Bickwell Valley Conservation Area mainly comprises two roughly parallel residential roads; Bickwell Valley following the lowest contours and Convent Road on higher ground to the east. Boughmore Road, the third important residential road, and with no through access, ascends the opposite side of the valley in a broad curve. There are several shorter access roads some forming links, others also having no through access.

2.2 Apart from the semi-rural aspect of Cotmaton Meadow and two short 19th century terraces set at right angles to each other at Cotmaton Road, the entire conservation area is characterised by large detached houses in a well-wooded setting with a roughly even mixture of mature deciduous and evergreen trees and hedgerows. The main concentration of specimen trees and tree groups is along the main Bickwell Valley road with two substantial deciduous groups to the southeast and northwest of Bickwell House.

2.2 Although the Bickwell Valley Study published jointly by Devon County Council and East Devon District Council in August 1977 did not initially recommend designation as a Conservation Area, there was considerable local pressure for the particular quality of this part of Sidmouth to be recognised and formal designation eventually took place in January 1978.

3 BUILT ENVIRONMENT

3.1 The intrinsic pattern of development of Bickwell Valley was largely complete by 1912 with relatively few plots not yet built upon, but in most cases already marked out. The 1889 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 plan shows no evidence of road construction, but the 1905 equivalent shows the existing road pattern already in place and several houses already completed (e.g. Berwyn, Moorings, Old Orchard and Southfield). These are typically Edwardian in style; alluding to earlier periods, and reflecting the neo-vernacular and Arts and Crafts style which were popularised by practising architects and craftsmen of the time such as William Morris, C.R.Ashbee, C.F.Voysey, Ernest Gimson, F.Baillie-Scott and Philip Webb.

3.2 After 1912 development continued slowly, but later dwellings were of similar quality and style although of plainer detail and rendered externally, and in rather less spacious surroundings. A good example is Uplands (1933) and also houses along the south side of Boughmore Road. Although there have been some later additions, the area remains an essentially Edwardian suburb with inter-war additions. Most dwellings appear to have remained in single occupancy and are what may be termed "select" in that they enjoy considerable privacy within a mature and richly varied landscape setting. Nevertheless the area has been, and remains, subject to pressures for intensification of development.



Bickwell Farmhouse, originally 17th century with 20th century modifications giving an Arts and Crafts finish

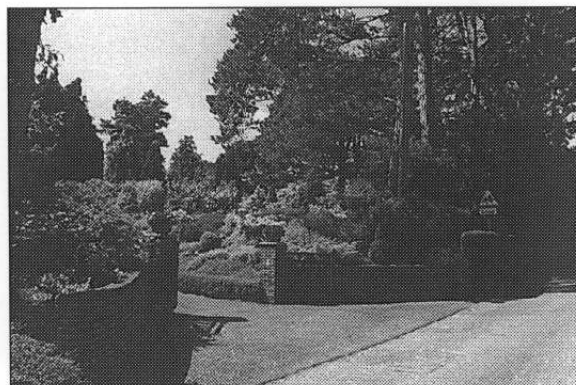
4 LANDSCAPE AND TREES

4.1 The major landscape elements of Bickwell Valley are its setting within the surrounding countryside which is within the East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; the extensive cover of trees and vegetation screening dwellings, and Cotmaton Meadow forming a natural break at the southern entrance into the conservation area.

4.2 The steep slopes of woodland and pasture above Bickwell Valley are of great importance to its character and appearance, and to Sidmouth as a whole, and are strongly protected by long established planning policies.

4.3 Within the residential area itself there is extensive tree cover. Bickwell Valley Road consists mainly of a line of mature lime trees with a number of specimen parkland conifers and hardwoods in the gardens. Other dominant species include oak, sycamore, beech, ash and Holm Oak, as well as conifers such as Scots pine, western red cedar, cypress and yew. Some have already reached or are slightly beyond full maturity and are starting to die back. Tree Preservation Orders within the area are relatively few, although conservation area designation provides almost equivalent protection.

4.4 Cotmaton Field, owned by the National Trust is leased as an agricultural tenancy. Only routine maintenance of trees and hedges around the margins of this important private open space is envisaged by the Trust which should enable it to continue to contribute to the special character of Bickwell Valley.



Convent Road; a typical example of the rich landscape setting of the larger houses

5 BUILDING MATERIALS AND ORNAMENT

5.1 The majority of dwellings are solidly built of red brick and plain tile with use of timber ornament, especially to porches and upper storeys. Each house varies considerably in design and finish, and the best examples have massive chimney stacks.

6 SYNOPSIS OF LISTED BUILDINGS

6.1 There is just one statutorily listed building within the conservation area; the mainly 17th century Bickwell Farmhouse.

6.2 In the southeast corner of the conservation area in Cotmaton Road are three former Grade III buildings, now on the Local List.



Convent Road; house dated 1911

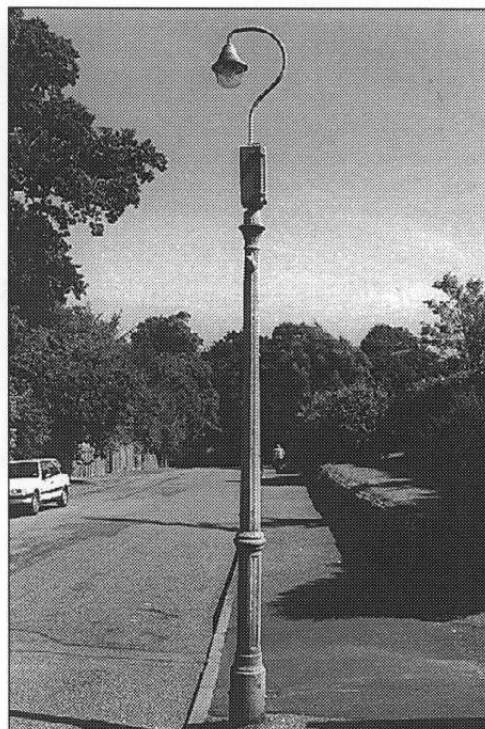


Cotmaton Road; a scattered group of early 19th century cottages, some with Regency detail

7 FEATURES OF SPECIAL IMPORTANCE

7.1 The Bickwell Valley Conservation Area has the following elements which contribute to or enhance its character and are of paramount importance when considering proposals for new development or alterations to existing development:

- retention of the quality of its origins as a wealthy and spacious Edwardian suburb (N.B. Edward VII Pillar Box)
- maintenance of the character of a wide cross-section of early 20th century large houses with some good examples of Arts and Crafts and Neo-Vernacular styles
- large landscaped gardens and many mature specimen trees, including several varieties of conifer. An avenue, mainly of limes, lining the main through road emphasises the importance of the arcadian setting
- the importance of the significant area of open space at Cotmaton Field to the south which helps to emphasise the separate, somewhat exclusive identity of this part of Sidmouth
- recognition that such a mature development, established 90 years ago should still be surrounded by open countryside to the west and north, which emphasises the significance of its carefully selected arcadian origins and deliberately intended seclusion as there are no important through roads within the locality



Bickwell Valley; trees and walls predominate with few buildings evident



Bickwell Valley; mature trees line much of the road

Bickwell Valley; Edward VII letterbox

8 LOSS OF CHARACTER AND INTRUSION

8.1 The main elements of the Bickwell Valley Conservation Area which are considered to weaken its objectives are:

- the area designated is difficult to comprehend as having a cohesive identity apart from its historical context. It is essentially a spacious residential suburb with several separate roads which bear relatively little visual relationship to each other
- the dearth of listed buildings indicates that some of the early 20th century houses might only become candidates for listing if more fully researched, although at present it is unlikely that a sufficiently strong case can be made unless there are particularly fine period examples, or associations with well-known architects.
- there is some compromising of original detail in places, although much of is of high quality and is sufficiently robust not to require early replacement except for reasons of fashion or convenience.

9 SUMMARY

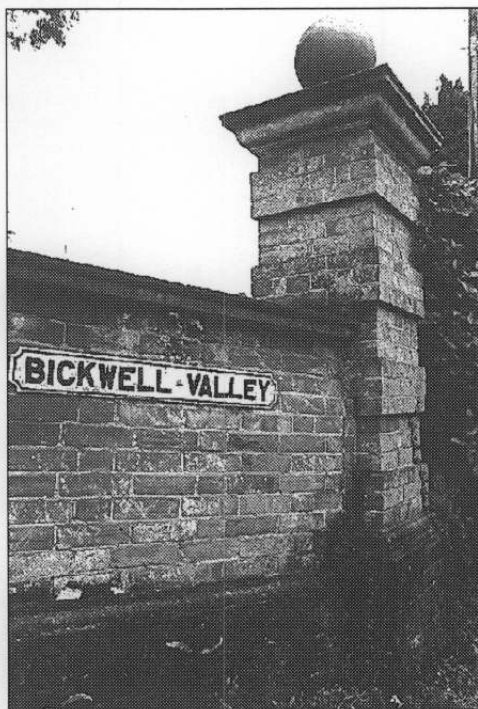
9.1 Bickwell Valley is a relatively unusual case for designation as a conservation area, as it is of largely early 20th century origin. Although the 1977 planning study did not consider that this part of Sidmouth merited designation, perceptions are changing and this part of the town reflects a microcosm of architectural style and ideals established at a time which can now be regarded as significant in the context of social history. Further research may reveal there are more important associations with well known practitioners of Arts and Crafts and Garden Suburb styles than has hitherto been appreciated.

9.2 In this context, which is also significant in landscape terms, the additional controls that designation confers such as protection of trees and external appearance of buildings is now considered appropriate and should be effective. The policy statement in paragraph 10.1 of the planning study states: "Both the East Devon District Council and the Devon County Council recognise that areas such as Bickwell Valley have a vital role in the continued conservation of Sidmouth, and continued vigilance and care in considering every potential development..should ensure that its special character and quality is not eroded away".

9.3 Although a measure of subdivision of curtilages and infill of recent development has occurred, this is considered insufficient to have yet compromised the intrinsic character of this interesting example of early 20th century town and country planning.



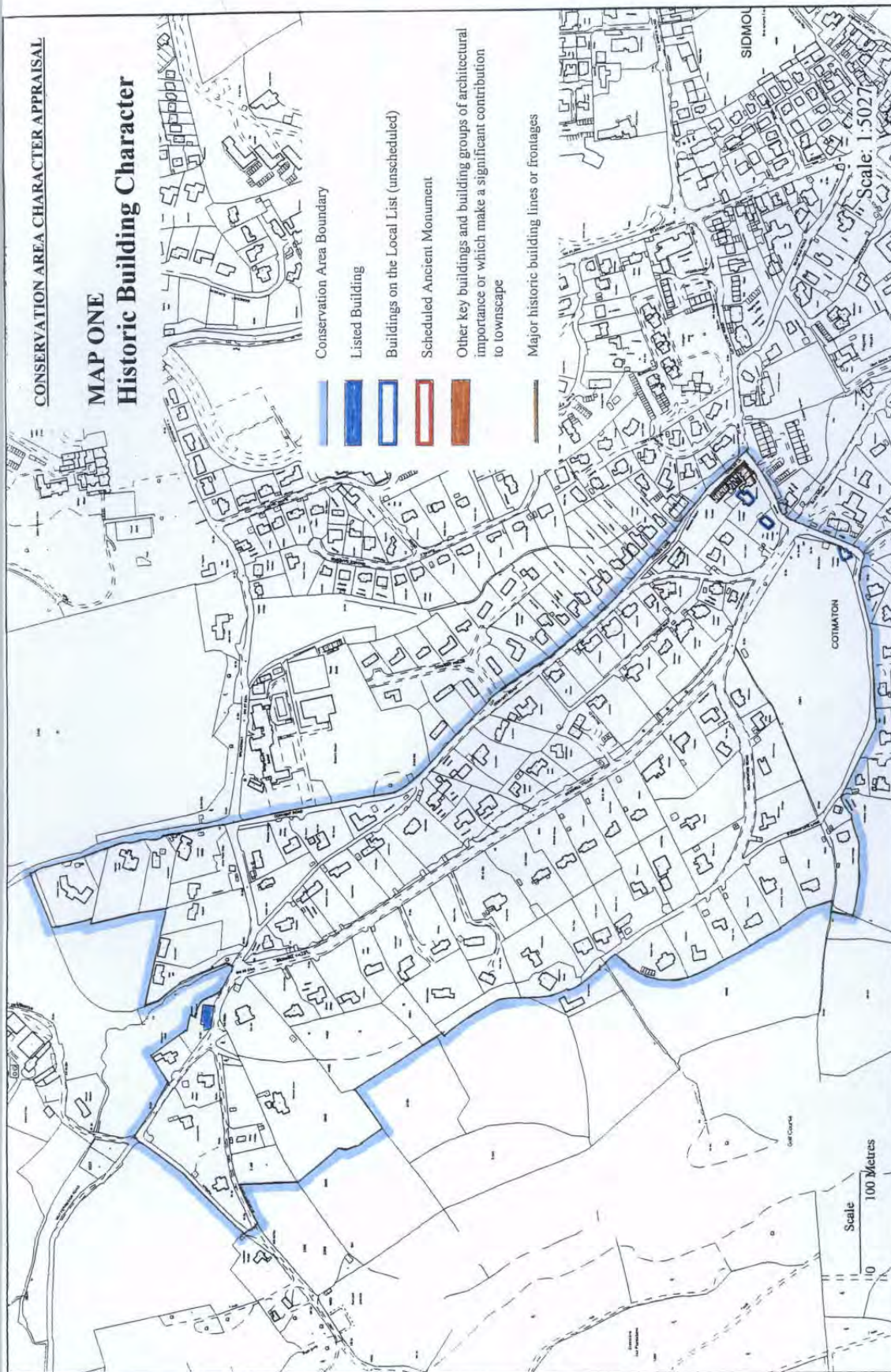
Bickwell Cottage; a typical house in Bickwell Valley



Cast iron sign, one of several similar in the area, at the north end of Bickwell Valley. The brick wall shows close attention to architectural detail that typifies much better early 20th century development.

CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL

MAP ONE Historic Building Character



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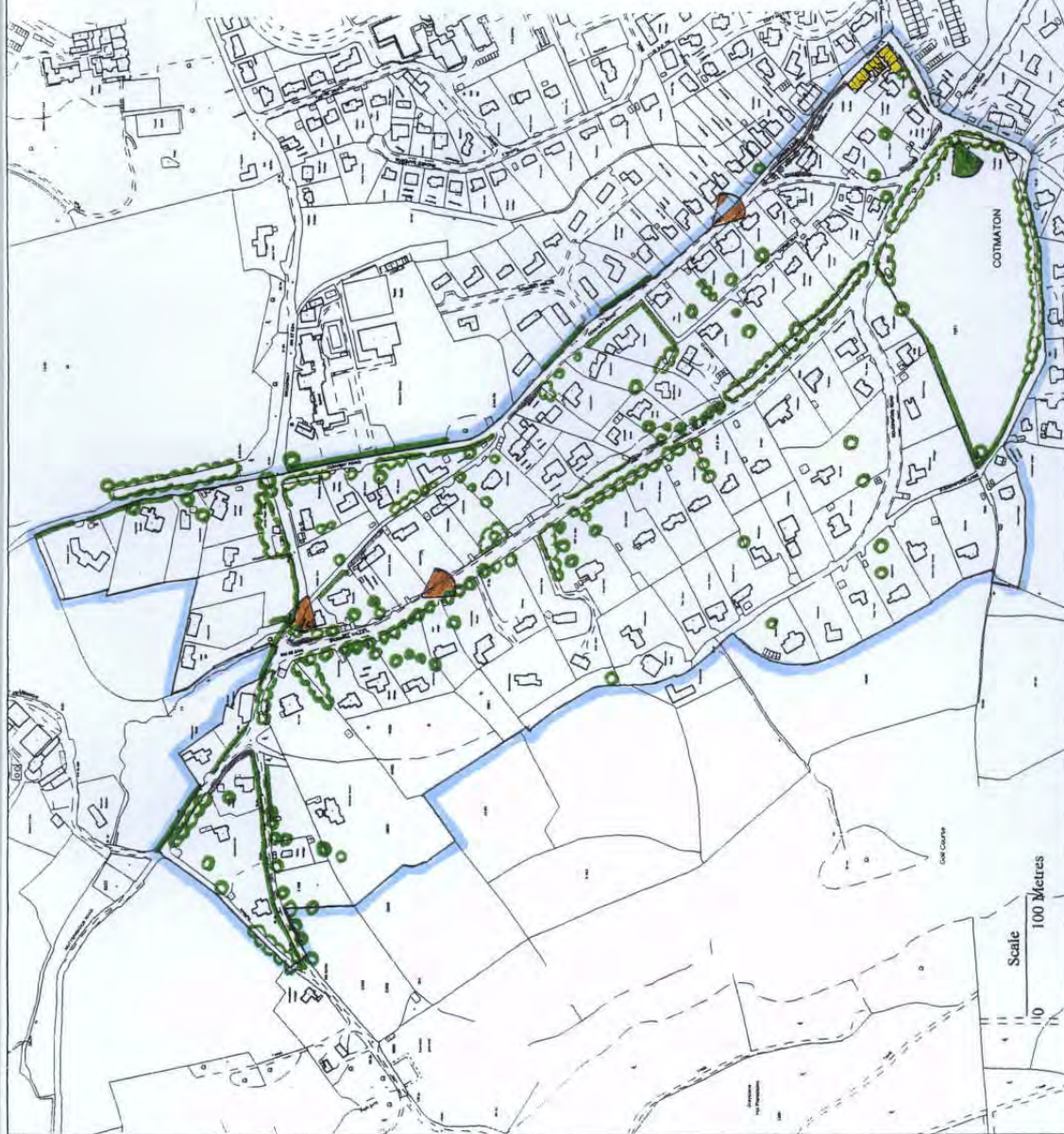
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CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL

MAP TWO Important Features

- Significant Landmark
- Feature of Special Interest
- Largely unspoilt frontages retaining significant period detail (including original shopfronts)
- Important building groups, normally of similar date, character or frontage detail
- Main tree groups and individual trees
- Open space with unrestricted public access
- Open space with limited or restricted public access
- Useful pedestrian links
- Prominent walls
- Main hedgerows
- Surfaces in traditional/natural materials
- Viewpoints - open / long distance
- Viewpoints - enclosed or partially enclosed
- Water features



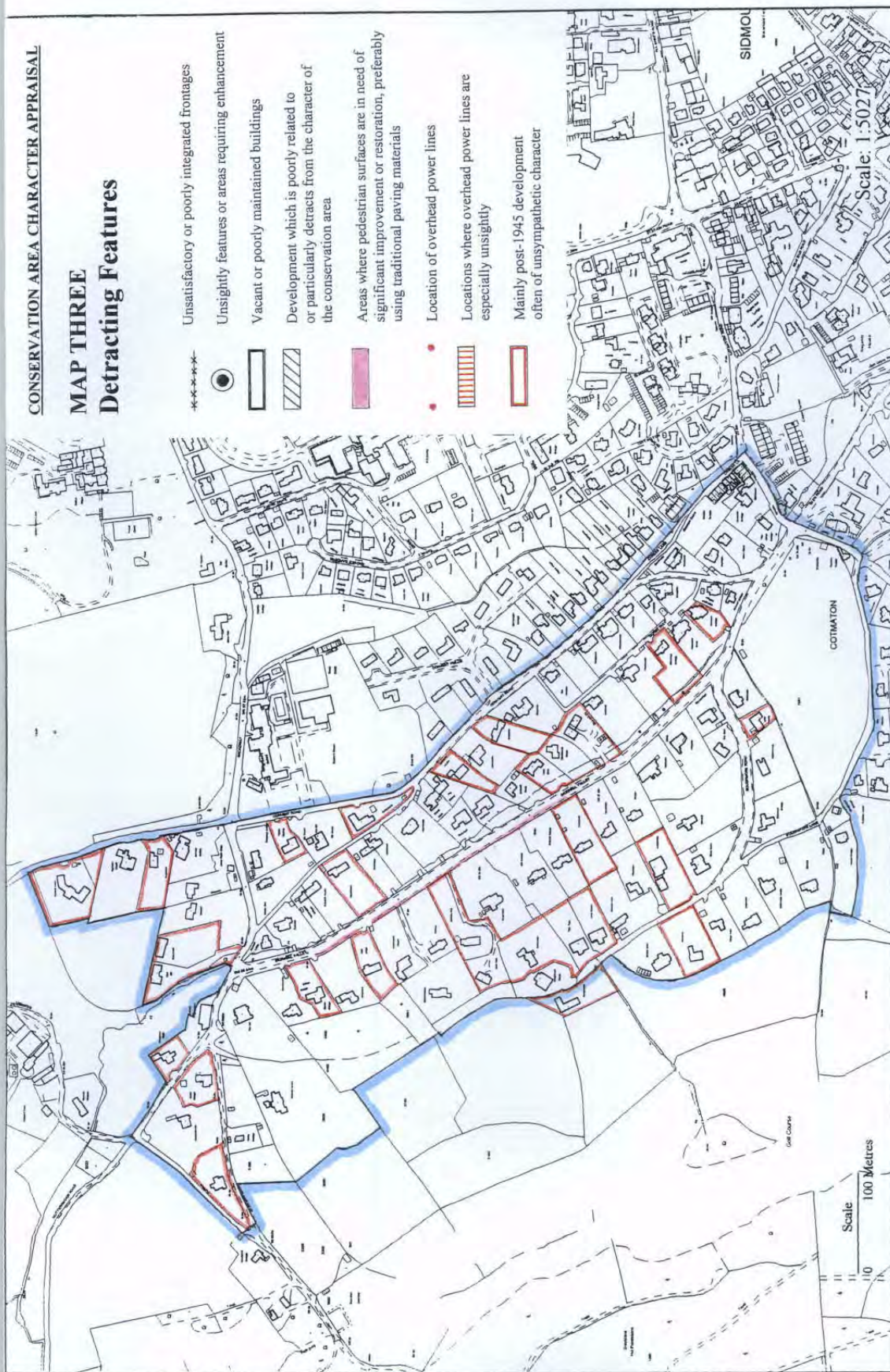
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CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL

MAP THREE Detracting Features



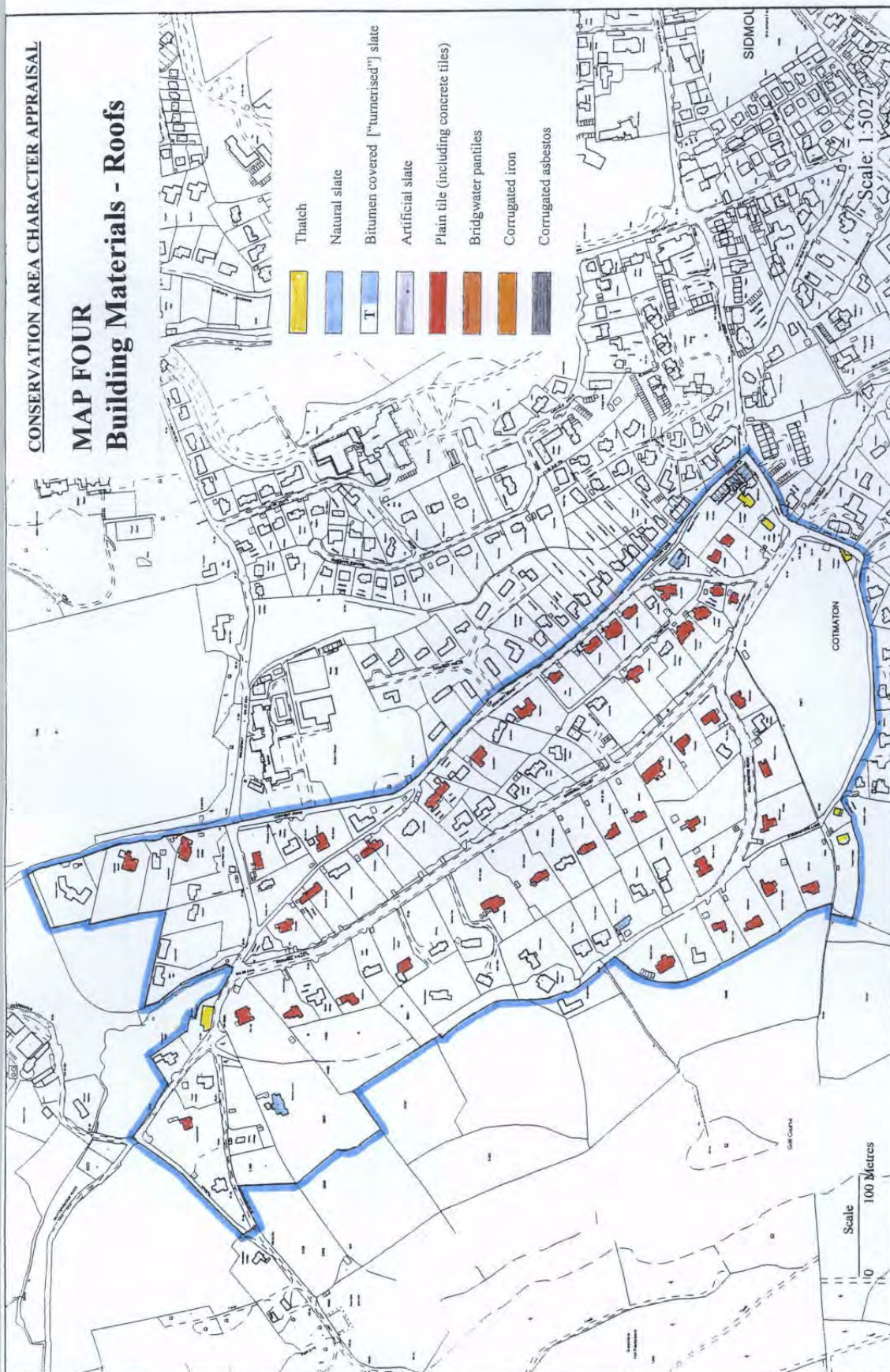
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CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL

MAP FOUR
Building Materials - Roofs



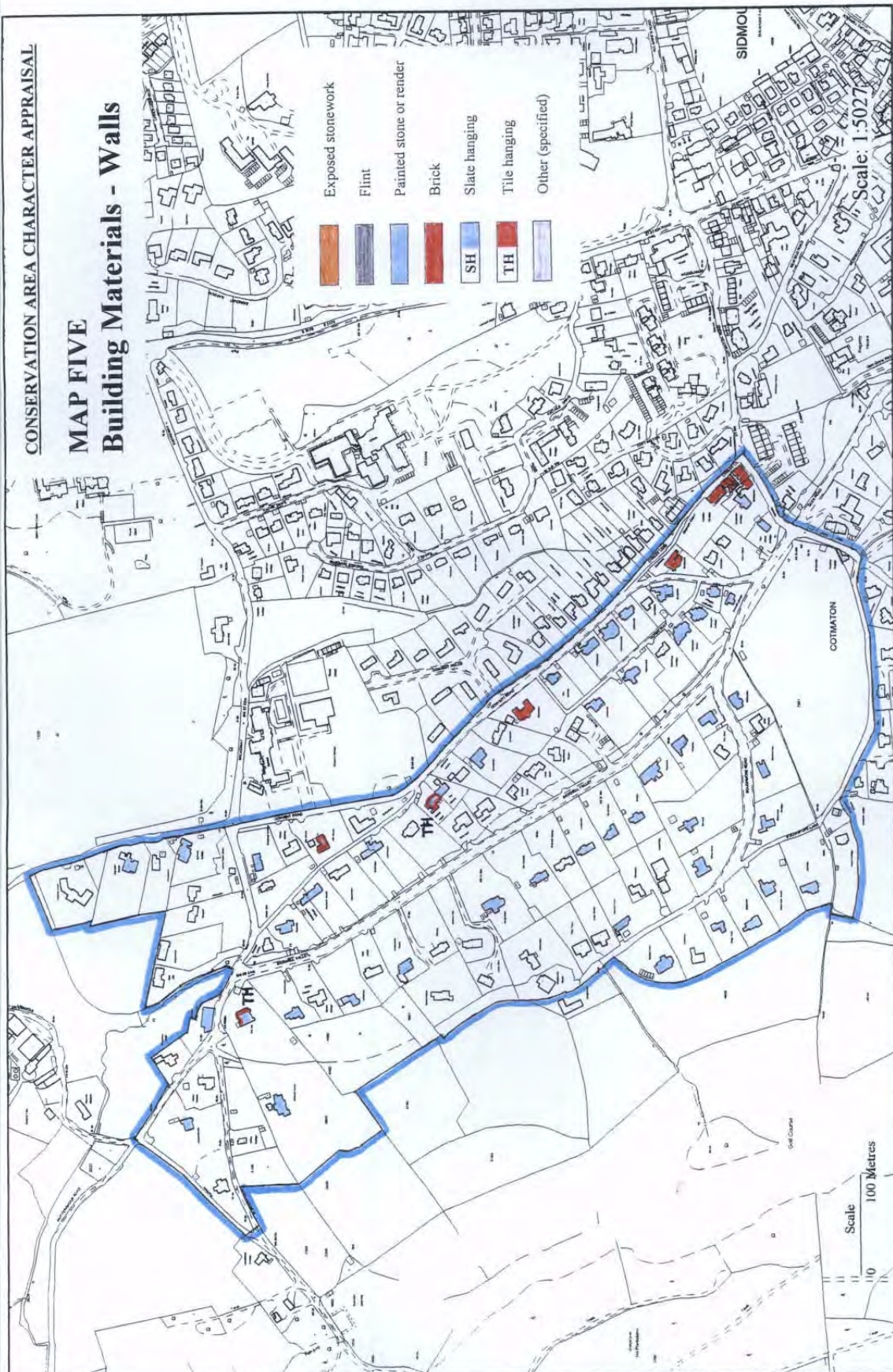
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CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL

MAP FIVE
Building Materials - Walls



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